

Australian car's name is tribute to Walsall man

AMERICA'S loss became Australia's gain when a young man, a native of Walsall, Mr. James Alexander Holden (brother of the late Sir Edward Holden) left the west coast of the United States to settle in Adelaide.

So says one of Australia's largest daily newspapers, "The Sun", which featured the Holden family in a recent edition.

Cuttings have been sent to the "Observer" by two Walsall emigrants who still take an interest in their home town, Mrs. Marguerite Dean of 3, Overend Close, Moorabbin, Victoria, and Mr. J. M. Noirit, of Toronto Avenue, Deewhy West, New South Wales.

"On arriving in Australia, young Mr. Holden went to Adelaide and in 1856 opened a leather shop at the corner of King William and Hindley Streets. From that small business later developed the firms of Adelaide Saddlers, J. R. Holden and Co., Holden and Frost, and Holden's Motor Body Builders Ltd. which, in 1931, was acquired by General Motors (Australia) Pty. Ltd. and resulted in the formation of General Motors-Holden's Ltd.," it states.

The feature was headlined "106 Years of Holden" and was published to celebrate the production of the 1,000,000th car by this motor corporation.

Mr. James Holden was born in Walsall in 1835, and was trained in the craft of leather manufacturing.

By then, his family was already well established in the town and prominent in public life. His brother, Edward, who founded the well-known Walsall leather firm of E. T. Holden Ltd., was Mayor of Walsall in 1904, an alderman for 36 years, and M.P. for the borough in 1891.

"James Holden sought wider fields and newer conditions than his home town and nearby Birmingham offered and, as a young man, he went to the United States. It seems possible that the news of great gold fields in Australia was the new magnet that next led him, two years later, to Australia," the article states.

"Adelaide was then a new city and times were bad everywhere in Australia except near boom gold fields. But James Holden had not only skill in leather, but exceptional business acumen and his small business prospered."

By 1878, he had occupied more spacious premises and his firm was also engaged in vehicle building and repair, and in the restoration and production of vehicle upholstery.

Nine years later he died, and, it was observed, left behind him "an outstanding record of business

success, civic prominence and liberality and service to his fellow men. With three others he had established the Baptist faith in Adelaide, and had achieved eminence as a commissioner of exhibitions held at London, Paris, Melbourne and Sydney, and as founder of the Adelaide Chamber of Manufacturers."

After the death of James Alexander, the Holdens continued to prosper and became one of Australia's leading families.

The eldest grandson, Mr. Edward Wheewall Holden, was knighted for his contribution to South Australia's "great leap forward." He became an M.P. and also featured prominently in the Chamber of Manufacturers and as a member of Adelaide City Council. He was a director of several leading companies and it was "his drive and initiative that did much to develop the motor body building firm."

Output soared

By 1922, production had reached 555 bodies a month, and two years later — when new plant was in operation — annual output had risen to 22,150.

General Motors-Holden's Ltd. was formed during the years of depression, and the corporation's post-war decision to build an all-Australian car brought a tribute to the Holden family from the United States when the late Sir Edward Riley (general manager of General Motors Overseas Operations) suggested that the new car should be called Holden.

"Under that name the Australian car was announced on November 29, 1948. Since then 1,000,000 Holdens have been produced in Australia by G.M.H. and the word Holden has become part of this nation's language," observes "The Sun."